

found jobs in the expanding university system, helped to enshrine modernist literature there, and profoundly recast English departments. This story—the story of the victors—is so familiar as to seem like the only one. Filreis arrays vast archival evidence to prove just how much has been neglected. *Counter-revolution of the Word* focuses on marginal figures, exhuming both the communist poets who languished after the war and the conservative figures who attacked not only them but also the centrist critics in the academy. The cold war reactionaries often conflated modernist aesthetics with communism and railed against both. The study emphasizes the use to which the fifties put the thirties: how, in two decades, traditional poetry went from being apolitical to reactionary, while modernism went from radical to mainstream. The chapters, woolly with research, favor anecdotes, twists, turns, qualifications, and exceptions over broad conclusions. This makes for occasionally slow going but proves that poetry has never been a particularly quiescent horse to hitch to politics' cart.

—Eric Bennett

GENERAL NONFICTION

***The Reluctant Communist: My Desertion, Court-Martial, and Forty-Year Imprisonment in North Korea*, by Charles Robert Jenkins, with Jim Frederick. California, March 2008. \$24.95**

If the combination is possible, this little book is at once banal and mesmerizing. It is the first-person story (told through the pen of a *Time* magazine writer) of an American soldier who, in a fit of true stupidity, decided to desert his US Army unit by walking across the DMZ into North Korea in 1964. Today, he does not know what the North Korean regime thought of him, and that lack of information can serve as a metaphor for the darkness in which he was shrouded for the four decades he spent there. Jenkins's very small-scale celebrity status, as one of a tiny number of foreigners in one of the world's most repressed countries, won him a few material perks that were worthwhile only in the sense that famine and concentration camps came to describe the world around him. This account reminds us that totalitarian regimes are not content to

marginalize citizens; such regimes also demand untold hours of indoctrination, and inflict the humiliations and stress of incessantly ritualized behavior. The bleakness for Jenkins was broken up only by his eventual marriage to one of the Japanese citizens kidnapped by North Koreans on Japanese soil (her mother, accosted with her, remains unaccounted for). His regular companions were three other American deserters. Only the regime's unexpected release of some abductees back to Japan set in motion the liberation of Jenkins and his daughters in 2004. The star of most of the book seems to be not Jenkins but instead daily life in North Korea. But North Korea's sheen disappears when a photo of Jenkins's friends left behind reminds us that those individuals are, like most North Koreans themselves, still trapped there.

—Gerard Alexander

***Beyond the Black Box: The Forensics of Airplane Crashes*, by George Bibel. Johns Hopkins, December 2007. \$30**

Your airliner falls from the sky, and you perish, right? But statistically speaking, commercial planes rarely crash, and passengers seldom die. Bibel, professor of Mechanical Engineering at the University of North Dakota, organizes this study of aircraft safety around crash site investigations, but mostly he talks about aircraft design, as complex a subject as you can imagine. Along the way, he provides a mini-education in mechanical engineering, explaining at great length and fascination the operative characteristics of metals, gasses and fluids, the human body and crash dummies, electricity including lightning, and how engineers think. He explains why you shouldn't worry when the wingtips flex up to twenty-four feet and why your seat works better by deforming in an accident. In other words, most of what you know about crashes is wrong, and most of what he tells you is counterintuitive. Bibel takes responsibility for his readers' understanding, constantly digressing to set out basic concepts, explaining how things catch fire, for example, and using similes based on everyday events and objects. So how do you survive when your plane does crash? Sit over the wing, keep your seatbelt fastened, and get out fast.

—Don Fry